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Department of State TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL 542

PAGE 01 SAIGON 11938 281447Z

53
ACTION EA-20

INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-08 L-04 NSAE-00
NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-12 AID-28 UPW-01
RSR-01 /121

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R 281252Z JUL 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7923
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 11938

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: FURTHER ON MINH'S DECLARATION OF CANDIDACY AND RUNNING MATES

REF: (A) SAIGON 11728; (B) SAIGON 11787; (C) SAIGON 11800

1. SUMMARY: GENERAL MINH'S JULY 26 DECLARATION OF CANDIDACY STRESSED HE STILL MAY WITHDRAW. HIS SELECTION OF DEPUTY HO VAN MINH ADDS RELIGIOUS BALANCE TO HIS TICKET BUT WILL BRING GENERAL MINH FEW EXTRA VOTES. OPPOSITION BUDDHIST SENATOR VU VAN MAU'S LAST MINUTE REJECTION OF MINH'S FIRST CHOICE OFFER OF THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY LEAVES A WEAKER TICKET AND HAS CAUSED DISAPPOINTMENT AMONG SOME OF HE MORE PRO-MINH MEMBERS OF MAU'S GROUP. END SUMMARY.

2. IN HIS BRIEF STATEMENT TO G CSTS AT HIS JULY 26 RECEPTION FOR THE LOCAL PRESS, GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH OFFICIALLY DECLARED HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY BUT ALSO POINTEDLY WARNED THAT HE MIGHT WITHDRAW FROM THE RACE IN THE EVENT OF AN UNFAIR ELECTION. ACCORDING TO UPI STRINGER PRESENT AT THE RECEPTION, MINH SAID THAT "I ASK YOU--THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM--TO GIVE ME A WAY OUT

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Department of State **TELEGRAM**

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAIGON 11938 281447Z

IF I SEE THAT THE ELECTIONS ARE NOT FAIR. AND IF I SEE THAT THE ELECTIONS ARE NOT FAIR, I BEG YOU PARDON AND FORGIVE ME IF I PULL OUT..." DR. HO VAN MINH, SENATOR MAU AND LAWYER TRAN NGOC LIENG ALL ALSO SPOKE ENDORSING THE SLATE AND BRIEFLY SECONDING THE GENERAL'S REMARKS.

3. IN HIS PREPARED REMARKS, GENERAL MINH SPOKE STRONGLY OF THE NEED FOR NATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN ORDER TO FIGHT COMMUNISM. HE EXPLAINED--PERHAPS DEFENSIVELY--HIS CHOICE OF A CATHOLIC RUNNING MATE, LH DEPUTY DR. HO VAN MINH, AND OF A CAO DAI SUPPLEMENTARY VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, SENATOR HONG SON DONG, AS A RESULT OF A DELIBERATE DECISION TO PROMOTE NATIONAL SOLIDARITY THROUGH A "RELIGIOUS SOLUTION" RATHER THAN THROUGH REGIONAL BALANCE. AGAIN EMPHASIZING HIS APPEAL TO THE RELIGIONS, MINH ADDED THAT HE "WILL OPEN HIS GOVERNMENT TO REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL RELIGIONS AND SOCIAL GROUPS FOR PARTICIPATION." (FULL TEXT BEING POUCHED.)

4. TO REPORTERS' QUESTIONS GENERAL MINH ALLEGEDLY SAID THAT IF KY COULD NOT RUN AS A CANDIDATE "THE ELECTION WOULD LOSE ITS VALUE." ASKED ABOUT A COUP IN THE EVENT OF DISHONEST ELECTION, MINH SAID THE PEOPLE WOULD "STRONGLY REACT" TO DISHONEST ELECTION BUT A COUP WAS "AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY AT THIS TIME." ASKED WHETHER HE HAD RAISED THE QUESTION OF "AMBASSADOR BUNKER BEING AN ELECTION RIGGING MACHINE" IN HIS JULY 5 MEETING WITH DR. KISSINGER, MINH DENIED THAT HE HAD AND POINTED OUT THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER WAS PRESENT AT THE MEETING. MINH ALSO SAID THAT THE SYMBOLS FOR HIS CAMPAIGN WOULD BE TWO DOVES, A BUNDLE OF RICE, AND A PLOW, WITH THE SLOGAN "PEACE FOR THE FATHERLAND."

5. COMMENT: MINH'S SELECTION OF DEPUTY MINH, A SOUTHERN CATHOLIC, AND SENATOR DONG, A CAO DAI, DOES ADD RELIGIOUS BALANCE TO MINH'S TICKET. BOTH DEPUTY MINH AND SENATOR DONG ARE ENERGETIC AND ABLE INDIVIDUALS. DR. MINH HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN THE WORK OF THE LOWER HOUSE, AND HAS A SOLID BUT SMALL CONSTITUENCY IN SAIGON FROM HIS SOCIAL AND CHARITABLE MEDICAL WORK, BUT NEITHER OF GENERAL MINH'S RUNNING MATES IS A NATIONALLY WELL KNOWN POLITICAL FIGURE NOR DOES WITHER HAVE MUCH INFLUENCE WITHIN HIS RESPECTIVE RELIGIOUS CONSTITUENCY. MOREOVER THE ADDITION OF TWO MORE SOUTHERNERS TO GENRAL MINH'S TICKET WILL OPEN MINH TO CHARGES OF REGIONAL DISCRIMINATION,

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Department of State **TELEGRAM**

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAIGON 11938 281447Z

POSSIBLY CAUSING HIM SOME TROUBLE IN CENTRAL VIETNAM AND A COMPLETE FORFEIT OF THE ALREADY HOSTILE NORTHERN VOTE.

6. APPARENTLY THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS ON DR. MINH'S SELECTION WAS AS FOLLOWS: AFTER MULLING OVER A VARIETY OF POSSIBILITIES GENERAL MINH LAST WEEK OFFERED THE CANDIDACY TO DR. MINH. DR. MINH RECOMMENDED SENATOR VU VAN MAU AS A MORE USEFUL PAIRING BUT TOLD THE GENERAL HE WAS AVAILABLE IF NECESSARY. SENATOR TON THAT NIEM, A MEMBER OF MAU'S SENATE GROUP, TOLD EMBOFFS JULY 27 THAT GENERAL MINH THEN OFFERED THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY TO MAU ON JULY 23. AFTER CONFERRING WITH HIS COLLEAGUES WHO GAVE HIM VARYING ADVICE, MAU REJECTED THE OFFER AT THE LAST MINUTE (MORNING OF JULY 26). MAU'S DECISION CAUGHT MANY BY SURPRISE, INCLUDING SOME MEMBERS OF HIS OWN GROUP AND THE SAIGON POST, WHICH IMPRUDENTLY ATTEMPTED A SCOOP WITH BANNER HEADLINES JULY 26 ANNOUNCING A MINH-MAU TICKET. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM MAU'S REASONS FOR REJECTING MINH'S OFFER, REPORTEDLY HE CONSULTED SENIOR AN QUANG MONKS, PRESUMABLY THICH TRI QUANG, WHO IS SAID EITHER TO HAVE INTERPOSED CONDITIONS UNACCEPTABLE TO MINH OR OTHERWISE OBJECTED, POSSIBLY FEARING THAT AN OVERLY CLOSE BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION WITH MINH WOULD CAUSE THE CHURCH TO LOSE PRESTIGE IN THE EVENT THAT MINH WAS DEFEATED. HOWEVER, MAU'S DECISION HAS SPARKED DISAPPOINTMENT AND ANNOYANCE AMONG SOME OF HIS SENATE SLATE COLLEAGUES WHO ARE ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS OF GENERAL MINH. SENATOR NIEM FOR INSTANCE SAYS HE BELIEVES THAT MAU'S DECISION TO ABSTAIN HAS SEVERLY WEAKENED GENERAL MINH'S CHANCES. DR. NGUYEN VAN BONG AGREED.
BUNKER

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